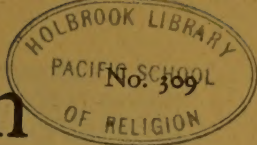


The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
KATHLEEN
BLISS



14th April, 1948

A PHRASE WHICH is constantly brought into play in current speech and writing is "the decline of the middle classes". There seems to be wider agreement on the fact of decline than on any precise definition of what it is. The subject is one of importance from the public point of view, and it also affects Christians very closely—for who would be prepared to deny that the Churches are in closer touch with, and draw more of their adherents from, the middle classes than from any other class.

The *Economist*¹ recently published four articles in which an attempt was made to analyse this decline. The main argument may be summarised as follows :

The core of the middle classes is the professional man. He is not now distinguished from the working man by being better off : his distinction is a university degree and a professional qualification (or their substitutes) and the fact that he lives on salary or fees and not upon a weekly wage or on income from land or capital. The most obvious mark of decline is the reduction in the real income of the professional man ; he would need to be earning roughly £1,200 per annum now to maintain about the same standards as were given him by £800 a year before the war. Only at the top of the professions is this figure now reached. For example, the most highly qualified teacher who is not a Headmaster

NEWS-LETTER

THE MIDDLE CLASSES

THE SPIRITUAL CALLING OF
THE CHRISTIAN LAYMAN

VISCOUNT HAMBLEDEN

SUPPLEMENT

CHRISTIANITY AND THE
MODERN WORLD VIEW—II

BY

H. A. HODGES

¹ See the *Economist*, January 24th, 31st, February 14th, 21st.

gets a maximum of £615 per annum. Away down at the bottom (with a few rare exceptions) come the earnings of the ministry of every denomination. The professional man cannot, like the rich, live out of capital, nor can he like many a business man "work miracles of good living on his expense account". What hits the professional man hardest is loss of leisure. Time which used to go on "the exchange of ideas, the cultivation of the humanities, voluntary social work, civic activities, is now spent on an overspill of work and on domestic jobs". Almost worse, the professional man feels himself to be the target of Government attack. Politically the middle class is in a curious position: it holds the balance in that it "certainly makes up the two million votes which gave Labour victory in 1945". Yet neither large party bothers to espouse its cause. This is the more extraordinary because the middle class contains most of those experts on whom modern Governments so heavily rely. Membership of the middle class ought to be the social and cultural prize of ability and hard work—Soviet Russia has indeed created such a class for such an end. But what we seem to be getting in this country is an egalitarianism which dislikes any kind of social difference.

Thus the *Economist's* contributor. All that the writer says about the loss of standard of living is—any member of the middle classes will bear this out—true, painfully true.

What is perhaps most striking in the situation is the sharp contrast in attitude within the middle classes to the acknowledged fact of their decline. At one extreme are those who think that the main object of political and economic endeavour at the present moment should be to pick up the threads which were broken in 1939 and reweave the pattern as before, perhaps with a few embroidered embellishments, such as less unemployment and, when everything else has been restored, some improvements in working-class housing and education. At the opposite extreme are the members of the middle classes who clearly recognize that the Britain of the future is removed from the Britain of the past by what amounts to a social revolution. The loss of Great Britain's capital assets compels her now to live by hard work, eked

out by American aid, and this fact alone, quite apart from a Labour Government gives an altogether new importance in society to its working classes. Members of the middle classes who think in this way are also the ones who see that the nation's decision to direct all its power and resources to the prevention of large-scale unemployment means not a few embroideries on the pattern of the nation's life, but radical changes in that pattern which must change very markedly the position, privilege and influence of the middle classes.

Among that section of the middle classes which we first mentioned, there is therefore loud and bitter lamentation of their lot, combined with castigation of the Government as the chief and quite deliberate cause of all their miseries. At the opposite end those who accept change, accept perhaps too much as inevitable. While they see (in our opinion rightly) that the place of the middle classes in the nation's life is never going to be quite the same again, they are doing too little to ensure that they themselves have some say in settling what position the middle classes will hold. Once the middle classes, or a significant section of them, have accepted the fact of social change and are delivered from the impotence of an emotional clamour for things to be as they were, they have a large number of cards in their hands—brains, knowledge, skills which society cannot do without and long training in the discipline of association within their professions, without which no cause ever succeeds. The line of argument expounded in the *Economist* seems to assume that leisure cannot be had without wealth, and that the reason for the disappearance of leisure is the decrease of wealth. This is doubtfully true. It used to be true that leisure could be purchased by wealth, and the leisure of the Victorian middle classes was bought by the expenditure of money on service. But now money will scarcely buy service. One of the first things that has to be done, therefore, is for men and women in the professional classes to decide what it is they chiefly desire. Is it money, and things that can be bought with money? Or is it time? And how can time be mastered and made one's own without wealth?

What the middle classes have done in the past is to build up a way of life dependent on the assumption that money could buy time. Thus they have tended to move away from the centres of cities and from their work to outer suburbs. The time involved in the journey to work could be bought back by the possession of a car. Similarly, a large house and garden could be prevented from destroying all leisure by hiring resident domestic help. Now the cost of pleasant living is being extracted : it is swallowing up all leisure. In fact, we would dare to say that no person in society has less real leisure than the wife of the professional man with children.

There has also been another cost of this social segregation in distant suburbs, which is only now being paid. The middle classes have become remote from the rest of society. They are to working people largely an unknown class except in the context of work : they are thought of largely as an abstraction, and in working men's eyes their class characteristic is not wealth but exclusiveness—"setting themselves up," "not mixing in". Few of those who set such store by life in a middle class suburb, where nobody sets the wireless blaring with all the windows open, where children do not play cricket in the street, and privacy is easily achieved from neighbours who equally eagerly seek it, realize how socially impoverished their life is. Their idea of culture is so often reading the books that everybody else is reading and seeing the plays that all the neighbours have seen. In cutting themselves off from what they consider to be the undesirable influence of working-class neighbours they have barred themselves also from vigorous impulses which might have renewed their life.

This zoning of the middle classes into suburbs of their own has had a marked effect on Church life. Middle class churches are still the most vigorous in the country. But there is an increasing struggle both to keep up the standards within the single congregation and to support the many Christian causes whose life depends so largely on the earnings of the middle classes. These middle class congregations have become highly organized *home bases* in the Christian cause,

busy hives of activity preparing the ammunition which will be shot away elsewhere, on the foreign mission field, in the down town mission church or chapel, the orphanage, rescue home, settlement. All these causes are going to suffer loss of money, but the critical loss is loss of time, without which much work is already falling into decay and without which no thinking on future strategy can take place. A slackening momentum, against which a few will put up a gallant struggle, must be the inevitable result.

The News-Letter is often accused of giving balanced statements with which nobody can disagree. Here we have deliberately trailed our coat. Our letter-box is a wide one.

THE SPIRITUAL CALLING OF THE CHRISTIAN LAYMAN

One of the main pre-occupations of the C.N.-L. has been with the work and witness of the Christian in his secular calling. The exchanges which have been taking place between Christians in different countries in preparation for the first Assembly of the World Council of Churches have again and again brought this matter to the fore. The following comments, highly relevant to our situation in Great Britain, come from an industrialist in Germany, who is also a strong and active churchman.

“I don't know how things are elsewhere, but my own experience has been this. The great body of Protestant Christians have retained certain rudiments of Christian thinking, but they have only the most meagre acquaintance with theological thought. It is quite common, particularly in these days, to find people asserting, often with considerable vehemence, that they are Protestants. But what lies behind this? One is a Protestant—because one is not a Roman Catholic. People react with special sensitiveness when they see, as they do to-day, Catholicism taking the lead. One hears more and more often from the ranks of non-church-going Protestants the surprising complaint that, while the Roman Catholic Church is in the field, the Evangelical Church is out of the picture. The complaint is the more surprising and devastating because those who make it do not realize the reason for the ethical effectiveness of

Catholicism—its more marked ecclesiasticism. Consequently it is only in the rarest case that this sensitiveness in regard to Catholicism has its source in theological thinking, since in most instances Protestants have ceased to think theologically at all. That in itself is quite intelligible. How could it be otherwise? The Church has in reality done very little to educate its members in this respect.

“When one talks about these matters one is met everywhere and always with two objections. The first—whether before the war, or during the war, or after the war—is ‘no time’, and it is supported by all kinds of reasons. It will certainly not be on account of lack of gifts, but on account of lack of time, that Protestantism may some day suffer complete collapse. What takes the place of the various compulsions of Catholicism is not a spontaneous readiness to live in the sphere of the Church, to think theologically and to act for theological reasons, but simply nothing at all. Some completely mistaken interpretation of Luther, into the reasons for which I need not enter here, has uniformly fooled people. This is the second objection. Out of the doctrine that not only the vocation of the monk but the activity of the famous ‘maid in the stable’, of the house-keeper and the mother, of all secular callings, of service of the State and nation, is at the same time service of God, there has developed in the course of time a state of things in which temporal concerns (work, family, State, nation) have become almost the sole interests which fill and determine our life.

“If that continues to be so, if Protestants continue in the future to have ‘no time’, if the affairs of the secular life remain, even in the Church, the centre of interest, if men no longer gather together, and allow themselves to be gathered ‘under the Word’ in accordance with the ancient and permanently valid examples of the scriptures and of Church history, if the confession and the history of the Church continue to be a sealed book, if they know nothing of the Reformers and their teaching—but where is one to begin or to stop? It all seems so hopeless and one is tempted to despair. Where can one find attention, where can one find

an awakening in our ranks? Where does one come across a real understanding of what is at stake? How far is not only our action removed from true Christian responsibility, but also our thinking, the Protestant view of man, from the seriousness of the thought of the Reformers? For that the Church has no small guilt to bear. In comparison with the training of the clergy, the training of the laity has for generations been completely neglected. There has been in recent times some slight change for the better, but not nearly enough.

“Again, when the laity come together for serious discussion of their responsibility in public life, fierce controversy at once begins, and there are all kinds of hesitations. It is not disputed that there are grounds for these. But controversy in itself is not enough. Criticism is certainly necessary, but the Christian politician and the Christian in industry need more than criticism. They need encouragement and strengthening and renewal through the Gospel. They need the joy, a ‘heart at leisure from itself’, that the world cannot give. I have the impression that the decisive reason for so many failures in the attitude of the Christian to public affairs lies in the fact that those who carry the responsibility—and some one *must* carry the responsibility, and if Christians do not do it, then others will—have so largely to stand alone and are not supported by the prayers and practical co-operation of the congregation.”

VISCOUNT HAMBLEDEN

In the untimely death of Lord Hambleden the Christian News-Letter has lost one of its first and warmest friends. He was one of the small group which planned the launching of the News-Letter in the first months of the war. It was chiefly his generosity which made possible the capital outlay involved in launching the News-Letter. For five years Lord Hambleden was a member of the Editorial Board. The services rendered by W. H. Smith and Son to the day-to-day running of the News-Letter have been innumerable.

Lord Hambleden was the finest type of Christian layman. He loved the Church of God, and he expressed his affection

in active participation in his local Church, ungrudging service to many causes within the Church of England and active support of the ecumenical movement. He gave his time without stint and at great cost. In all his dealings he exemplified the faith he professed, and many will remember and give thanks to God for his ready and understanding sympathy, his courtesy and fairmindedness, his charm and humour, and above all his unstudied selflessness.

THE SUPPLEMENT

We publish in this number the second of the Supplements by Professor Hodges on Christianity and the Modern World View. Readers may like to be reminded that the first appeared in C.N-L. No. 305 and that some preliminary remarks on the proposed series were made in the first News-Letter of the year, No. 302.

The key thought of this present paper is found in the attitude which Professor Hodges described as "basic acceptance". The theme of all life, the thread which binds all experience together, is the relation of the self to the non-self. The non-self includes physical nature, living things, human persons, human institutions and the ultimate reality of God. It is within the power of the self to refuse the non-self, to drop an iron curtain between itself and the claims of the non-self. Life, for every human person, involves a choice between a basic acceptance and a basic refusal of the non-self. That human persons have this power of basic refusal is one of the ultimate mysteries of human existence, and one which lies so firmly in the centre of Christianity that no man can approach the faith without confronting it.

Kathleen Bliss

CHRISTIANITY AND THE MODERN WORLD VIEW—II

By H. A. HODGES

THIS paper and those which follow will deal with certain aspects of Christianity which seem to me to be central. These are in themselves not new. How could they be? If it is possible for new discoveries to be made in Christian truth, I am not the man to make them. Nor are they exhaustive. Again I could not aspire to make them so. But they are the best starting-point I could find for the purpose announced in my last paper, to analyse the Christian way of thinking. By this I mean discovering the reasons by which Christian belief is upheld and the logical links between its several parts, which are not always the same as the arguments used in its defence by apologists writing for the outer public, or for the non-Christian in themselves.

I do not mean that all or even most Christians reach their belief by thinking their way to it along the line of argument here set forth; the argument in parts claims only to formulate the reasons which operate obscurely in the Christian sub-consciousness, and which account for the feeling of evidence with which a belief, whose traditional intellectual supports have suffered grave damage, still takes possession of many minds. On what do I rest this contention? On the facts that (*a*) the more I interrogate my own mind, the more clear it becomes that these are my own real reasons for believing, in so far as I have reasons at all, that (*b*) I think I see signs of the same forces at work in the way other people argue or expound their faith, and that (*c*) the argument here given seems to me to be coherent and capable of sustaining the weight of belief.

CHRISTIANITY AS A WORLD FRAMEWORK

Christianity is a more far-reaching system of ideas than non-Christians or indeed many Christians realize, and cannot be expressed, explained, or defended in a few words. By "far-

reaching " I mean that it makes a difference to our conception of everything, and not merely of certain things. If someone imbued with the philosophy of scientific naturalism embarks for the first time on the study of psychology, that will alter his conception of the human mind in various details, but it will leave his world-framework untouched. If the same person becomes a Christian, it is precisely the world-framework which will be the first thing to be altered, and changes of detail will follow from this. Even nature is seen differently; not, of course, that Christians have different formulae for the laws of nature, but that they have different ideas of what those laws represent. The same is true of all human activities and values. Thus the adoption of Christianity represents a total change of mind, intellectual as well as moral, and to present its credentials is to show how this change of mind is justified.

To this question there can be no short answer, and none at all until the nature of Christianity, and of the change of mind which it requires, is understood. Exposition and explanation are an absolute prerequisite of defence. My concern in what follows is primarily with explanation, though the two things cannot be kept rigidly apart. To explain a system of ideas, if it is a reasonable system, is to exhibit it as reasonable, which is in itself a recommendation; and besides, I shall be explaining not only what Christians believe, but how the belief arises and how it works itself out and justifies itself in their own minds, so that the explanation will carry an essential element of defence within itself.

It is necessary to begin in this way because an understanding of Christianity cannot be presupposed, even in those who are interested in and friendly to it. In particular they fail to realize how far-reaching it is. They frame their questions and expect to get an answer within their own non-Christian world-framework, thus pre-supposing that Christianity is not a whole but a detail. We are expected to start with scientific naturalism or something similar, and argue to Christianity as an addition to, or an embellishment of, or a conclusion within this. The task has often been attempted by Christians, and a good deal of traditional apologetic consists in this attempt. I believe that it was

once possible to make a show of doing this, but that it was always a circular argument, and that the conditions which made it possible have ceased to prevail. We have now to begin by putting in the foreground the inclusive character of Christianity as a world-framework, and the challenge which it implies to all other such frameworks.

BASIC INTERESTS

The difference between one man's world-framework and another's reflects the difference between their basic interests. Thus it may fairly be said that scientific naturalism is the expression of an interest in knowledge about the spatio-temporal world in that sense in which knowledge is power. Knowledge, or power, or the two linked together, are the main object of the scientific naturalist's aspiration, and this means that the reality in which he is most interested is natural law. From this initial set of interest flow necessarily the methods and presuppositions of the working scientist.

What occupies in Christianity the same central position which the laws of nature hold in scientific naturalism? God; and God may be defined here (the definition is preliminary and must be dogmatic at this early stage) as a being other than ourselves, who embodies and exceeds our highest ideal, and with whom we can enter into relations. That this is the central object of interest in Christianity is unnoticed by many, even among Christians; listen to them talking, and see how often their talk circles about morality, or human destiny, or some other object which is not God, and how often God is treated as a counter, of uncertain value, to be played in a dialectical game on such subjects. But the evidence of the most authentic Christian literature and liturgy, with that of the individuals most deeply committed to Christianity in all ages, establishes that the real central object is God, and that everything else which interests the Christian does so because of some relation in which it stands to God.

This determines the task of our enquiry. We must explore the idea of God and its ramifications, discovering what form it takes in the minds of Christians, how it is related to other ideas

which offer rival accounts of the nature of ultimate reality, what questions arise when our interest is focused upon it, and how Christians try to answer them.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIAN BELIEF

The idea of God is not one which we construct, as we construct the idea of a horse, from observation of the object itself. We learn of Him first by hearsay, for we are born into a world where His name is in constant use ; and for many people He remains a matter of hearsay as long as they live. But whence did the idea of God arise in the first instance ? It has a history, much of which is known, but its origins are lost in obscurity. To call it innate is merely to shirk the labour of thought. The commonest view is that it arose in some way out of man's attempts to interpret the universe. Such interpretation always works from the familiar to the unfamiliar, and it would be easy to project a magnified human figure as the agent behind mysterious but apparently purposive natural phenomena. Perhaps the root idea may have been something like the Eldest Magician in Kipling's story of *The Crab that Played with the Sea*. But the origin of the idea matters little in comparison with the more developed forms which it has assumed.

The first recorded attempt to establish theism by argument was the work of Anaxagoras, and its basis was astronomy. To the Psalmist, indeed, the heavens declared the glory of God ; but he did not argue the case, he looked at the heavens and " saw " there the work of a God in Whom he already believed. Anaxagoras did something essentially different. He found that astronomical reasoning contained premises from which the existence of a kind of God naturally followed. Plato and Aristotle were able to formulate more recondite arguments which resembled Anaxagoras' work in that they started from the facts of nature as interpreted by contemporary thought. The argument from motion began with the fact that things change, interpreted this fact in terms of the categories of act and potency and the principle of the priority of act to potency, and so proved the existence of an unmoved mover. The argument from finitude began with the fact that there are degrees of being, interpreted this fact in

terms of the categories of essence and existence and the principle that what exists in varying degrees must also exist in an absolute degree, and so proved the existence of a supreme being in which essence and existence were one. To these was added the more popular argument from design, based especially upon the facts of organic life.

These arguments are logically valid, granted the premises ; and the premises constituted, throughout ancient and mediaeval times, apart from the opposition of the atomists, the agreed presuppositions of natural science and metaphysics. They thus represented a successful attempt to do what the scientist still expects us to do, viz. to argue from his premises to our own conclusion. But the happy change which came over scientific method 300 years ago has had for one of its consequences the disappearance of these categories and principles. They have gone so completely that it is not easy even to explain them to a modern scientific mind. Because of this they have also gradually faded out of philosophy. The new categories and principles which have replaced them are not such as to carry theistic implications, in spite of the gallant attempts of modern philosophers to show that they do. The traditional apologetic is thus left hanging in the air, and the attempts to argue theist conclusions from scientific or metaphysical premises cannot be sustained.

We are thus brought back to an earlier point. Christian thinking does not take its origins from ideas or principles which belong to any world-framework other than its own. What then are the first principles, other than those of science and peculiar to itself, from which it begins ?

NATURE AND FUNCTION OF A PRESUPPOSITION

The study of scientific method by logicians in the last 300 years has led to certain conclusions which are generally accepted. It is recognized that the secret of progress in natural science lies in a combination of mathematics with observation and experiment, and that the aim of the method so constituted is to discover regularities in the sequence of events. It is recognized also that in doing this the scientist consciously or unconsciously presupposes something. He presupposes that regularities of the

kind he is seeking are really there to be found, and that they are such as can be expressed mathematically. In spheres of enquiry where mathematics are less applicable, as in the human studies, the enquiry is still governed by the search for regularities. Even in history, which is often said to be, and in some sense is, a study of the concrete individual, what makes the difference between mere chronicling and genuine historical study is the presence in the latter of a consciousness of general principles underlying the course of events. In all these spheres the presupposition of regularity is made.

It is this presupposition which makes the whole enquiry possible. The question, what is the law of this phenomenon, does not arise unless we assume or take for granted that there is a law. If we do presuppose this, the question arises progressively over the whole field of experience, and scientific methods spring into existence as the means of answering it. This is what gives the presupposition its peculiar logical position. It is not open to question, and yet this is not because we know it to be true. It cannot be established either *a priori*, since it is not self-evident, or *a posteriori*, by the evidence of facts, since it is this presupposition itself which gives facts their force as evidence. For the same reason, of course, there can be no evidence against it. It stands above the region in which evidence is weighed and conclusions are drawn; but when it is presupposed, it turns every fact into evidence of other facts, and leads to an indefinite widening and co-ordinating of experience. For this reason, and because the results of a successful search for law in experience are so important to us, we *refuse* to question the presupposition which makes this search possible, and which is prejustified by the fact that we cannot begin the enquiry without it, and postjustified by the success of the enquiry when made.

The *refusal* is not an intellectual act, an apprehension of truth, but what I should like to call a *basic acceptance*. It is the choosing to explore a certain form of thought and experience, with a readiness to accept whatever we shall find there and submit to its influence upon our outlook, character and destinies. This fact is what some modern apologists have tried to express by saying that at the basis of every branch of experience, even science, lies an act

of "faith". This word, however, carries so many associations which are not relevant at this point, that I think it better not to use it, and to speak instead of a *basic acceptance*.

As a presupposition is not something known, so also it is not a theory or a hypothesis. Theories or hypotheses are ways of applying our presupposition to the available facts. A theory unites a group of diverse facts by exhibiting in them a single principle of form, and claims our assent so long as it does this. It is pre-justified in so far as further enquiry verifies it, but it remains always open to modification in the light of fresh facts. But a presupposition is unaffected by the discovering of fresh facts. It is what makes both the theory and its modification by fresh facts possible.

THE ABRAHAMIC PRESUPPOSITION

Now, I shall contend that Christian thinking proceeds on a presupposition of its own, which I shall call THE ABRAHAMIC PRESUPPOSITION, or ABRAHAMIC THEISM. For the New Testament insists over and over again that Abraham is the model for Jew and Christian alike, and that the true Christian is the spiritual child of Abraham, i.e. one whose relation to God is the same as Abraham's was. And here it does not matter whether the life story of Abraham as set forth in *Genesis* and interpreted in *Romans* and *Hebrews* is literal history or not. The point is that it gives us the standard by which our attitude to life is to be regulated, if it is to be a Christian attitude.

Abraham in the story is a man who has committed himself unconditionally into the hands of God; a man who does what God asks of him without hesitation, however paradoxical or self-contradictory it may seem, and who accepts God's promises, however mysterious and incredible they may appear. It is by virtue of this unconditional self-commitment to God that he has won the title of the Friend of God. But such an attitude evidently presupposes a great deal. It presupposes not merely the existence of God, about which the philosophers have debated so lengthily, but that God is of a certain character. It presupposes that God has complete control of the world and the course of events in it; that He exercises this control in a way which is

purposeful; that human beings have a place in His designs; and that He communicates with them in ways which they can legitimately understand as commands and promises, and by which their lives can be guided. This is the presupposition of Jewish and Christian thinking, which I call Abrahamic theism. To work it out in detail, showing how it applies in actual life and thought, is the business of theology.

The Abrahamic presupposition differs in obvious ways from the scientific presupposition, but it has the same logical properties and status. It is not a self-evident truth, nor a piece of knowledge gathered from experience, but a presupposition made as a result of a basic acceptance. It is prejustified because it enables us to open up a field of experience which cannot be opened up without it, and discoveries in which, if made, would have a close bearing on human interests. It gives facts a new significance, and raises questions and gives rise to theories of a distinctive kind. Its post-justification lies in the fact that theories do arise in this field which cover the known facts, point the way for further enquiries and fresh discoveries, and enable us to act in ways which are important and beneficial.

It is the task of our logic of Christian thinking to explain this in detail.

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